

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 22, 2014

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2013–14 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 2263

Introduced by Assembly Member Bradford

February 21, 2014

An act to add Article 7 (commencing with Section 2696) to Chapter 4 of Title 1 of Part 3 Sections 2695.1, 2695.2, 2695.3, and 2695.4 to the Penal Code, relating to veterans.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2263, as amended, Bradford. Veterans service—~~officers; ombudsman~~: correctional facilities.

Existing law establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for administering various programs and services for the benefit of veterans, *and the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to oversee the state prison system*. Existing law also authorizes each county board of supervisors to appoint a county veterans service officer to perform specified veterans-related services, including assisting veterans in pursuing claims for federal or state veterans' benefits. *Under existing law, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is required to develop guidance policies relative to the release of veterans who are inmates with the intent to assist veterans who are inmates in pursuing claims for federal veterans' benefits, or in establishing rights to any other privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided under federal or state law because of honorable service in the military. In developing those policies, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is authorized to coordinate with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the county veterans service officer or veterans service organizations.*

This bill would require a ~~parole agent to be appointed staff member to serve~~ as a veterans service ~~officer~~ *ombudsman* at each facility that is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. The veterans service ~~officer~~ *ombudsman* would be responsible for assisting inmates who are veterans in pursuing claims for veterans' benefits, as specified. The bill would require the veterans service ~~officer~~ *ombudsman* to coordinate with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and county veterans service officers, as specified.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. It is the intent of the Legislature to help inmates
2 who have served in the military to access federal and state veterans'
3 benefits earned from military service so that those inmates are
4 better equipped to successfully reintegrate into the community,
5 thereby reducing costs to the state.

6 ~~SEC. 2. Article 7 (commencing with Section 2696) is added~~
7 ~~to Chapter 4 of Title 1 of Part 3 of the Penal Code, to read:~~

8
9 ~~Article 7. Veterans Service Officers~~

10
11 ~~2696. At each facility that is under the jurisdiction of the~~
12 ~~Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, there shall be a~~
13 ~~parole agent who is appointed as a veterans service officer. For~~
14 ~~purposes of this article, "veterans service officer" means the parole~~
15 ~~agent appointed pursuant to this section.~~

16 ~~2696.1. The veterans service officer is responsible for assisting~~
17 ~~inmates who are veterans in pursuing claims for federal veterans'~~
18 ~~benefits, or in establishing rights to any other privilege, preference,~~
19 ~~care, or compensation provided under federal or state law because~~
20 ~~of honorable service in the military. The veterans service officer~~
21 ~~is authorized to appoint inmates who have served in the military~~
22 ~~to assist with these responsibilities.~~

23 ~~2696.2. The veterans service officer shall coordinate with the~~
24 ~~United States Department of Veterans Affairs in order to provide~~
25 ~~inmates who are veterans with the most efficient access to earned~~
26 ~~veterans' benefits.~~

1 ~~2696.3. The veterans service officer shall coordinate with the~~
2 ~~Department of Veterans Affairs and the county veterans service~~
3 ~~officer in the county in which the facility is located for advice,~~
4 ~~assistance, and training, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the~~
5 ~~program.~~

6 *SEC. 2. Section 2695.1 is added to the Penal Code, to read:*

7 *2695.1. At each facility that is under the jurisdiction of the*
8 *Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, there shall be a*
9 *staff member who shall serve as a veterans service ombudsman.*

10 *SEC. 3. Section 2695.2 is added to the Penal Code, to read:*

11 *2695.2. The ombudsman described in Section 2695.1 shall be*
12 *responsible for assisting inmates who are veterans, including, but*
13 *not limited to, facilitating access of inmates who are veterans to*
14 *county veterans service officers, United States Department of*
15 *Veterans Affairs and California Department of Veterans Affairs*
16 *officers and personnel, and facilitating access to the inmates who*
17 *are veterans by those officers and personnel, so that the inmates*
18 *who are veterans may pursue claims for federal veterans' benefits*
19 *or any other privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided*
20 *under federal or state law because of service in the military.*

21 *SEC. 4. Section 2695.3 is added to the Penal Code, to read:*

22 *2695.3. The ombudsman described in Section 2695.1 shall*
23 *coordinate with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs*
24 *in order to provide inmates who are veterans with access to earned*
25 *veterans' benefits.*

26 *SEC. 5. Section 2695.4 is added to the Penal Code, to read:*

27 *2695.4. The ombudsman described in Section 2695.1 shall*
28 *coordinate with the California Department of Veterans Affairs*
29 *and the county veterans service officer in the county in which the*
30 *facility is located for advice, assistance, and training, and to*
31 *evaluate the effectiveness of the program.*